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**Ansvarshavende
redaktør:**

Henrik Larsen,
Johan Kellers vej 37, 2.tv,
2450 København SV.

Layout: Palle Brahe

Billedmateriale:

Henrik Larsen
Mark Johnston
Carey Maier
Nils Markvardsen

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Alle illustrationer er udelukkende benyttet i oplysningsmæssig henseende.



LEDER

"År to tusind og to". Prøv at sige det højt. Ordene har en umiskendelig klang af science-fiction, af månebaser, rumkolonier, intergalaktiske imperier, strålepistoler, syntetiske fødevarer, verdensregering, cyborger, androider, kryogenetik, tidsrejser, telepati og så videre. Men hvor bliver den af, fremtiden? Her i den sidste time af år 2001 sidder din redaktør og kæmper med at få skrevet lederen færdig. Jeg ser ud af vinduet, ud på Københavns Sydvestkvarter dækket af sne, og kan ikke skimte nogle særlige futuristiske træk ved gadebilledet. Det kan jeg i øvrigt heller ikke ved min bolligs indretning. Nok skrives dette på en smart dataterminal og til adspredelse har jeg avancerede afspillere af musik og levende billeder stående langs den ene væg, men jeg har også to store træreoler, tunge af bøger. Skuffer og hylder er proppet med hæfter, tegneserier, udklip med videre. På væggene hænger indrammede stik fra forrige århundrede. Jeg er 34 år gammel. Neil Armstrong satte sin fod på Månen, da jeg var 2, jeg kan huske i 1978, da de sagde i radioen, at Groucho Marx var død og et par år senere fik vores skole som en af de første i landet nogle fantastisk avancerede edb-maskiner af mærket "ABC80" til undervisning i datalære. Jeg er ung nok til at kunne følge med udviklingen, men jeg er også præget af at have levet en barndom uden reklametv og Internet. Det giver en vis modstandskraft overfor kommercialismens tyranni som de yngre generationer ikke besidder (og derfor udgør et langt mere attraktivt markedssegment). Hvad så, Henrik, var alting virkelig bedre i gamle dage? Nej, selvfølgelig ikke. Vi havde vores andel af regionalkrige, naturkatastrofer, sygdomsepidemier, politisk diletterteri og urimelige skatter. Vi havde to rivaliserende supermagter, hvis samlede atomarsenaler kunne udslette al højerestående liv på kloden op til flere gange. (Desværre har dette ikke ændret sig. Selvom den kolde krig er forbi og antallet af atomsprænghoveder fordelt på de respektive lande reduceret, er der stadig rigeligt til at gøre de mest pessimistiske dommedagsprofetier til skamme.) Vi levede vistnok også lidt kortere i gennemsnit. Forbrugsgoderne, da? Her er jeg på fastere grund i min overbevisning om at det er gået tilbage, for vi stillede rigtig nok andre krav til kvalitet dengang. Tag f.eks. juletræet. Jeg holdt traditionen tro jul hos mine forældre som havde indkøbt et højt, flot træ. I gamle dage dryssede nålene allerede første juledag og så kunne man stikke sig nederdrægtigt, hvis man gik på bare fødder i stuen, ligesom man altid stak sig under oppyntningen. Til gengæld duftede der lifligt af granskov i hele huset. Og i dag? Ingen som helst duft og jeg måtte rive hårdt til for at få bare en enkelt nål løs; træet er i skrivende stund ikke begyndt at fælde endnu. Det kunne ligeså godt have været støbt i plastik. Og det er vel egentlig et typisk tidstræk: den blege, automatiserede re(pro)duktion af tidligere værdier. Vi ser det indenfor filmen og litteraturen: Genindspilningen, pastichen, parodien, citatet, referencen som stiløvelse uden ægte engagement har næsten komplet overtaget den originale historiefortælling (som selv altid har stjålet med arme og ben, allerede de gamle grækere gjorde det). På det seneste synes jeg dog at filmen har vist tegn på bedring, bl.a. under påvirkningen fra Asien og det er under alle omstændigheder næppe klogt at leve i fortiden af ren og skært princip, i kontrært eksil fra den forvirrende, postmoderne virkelighed. Gør dig bekendt med klassikerne, men se også fremad, for tiden lader sig ikke sætte i stå og tænk, hvis du gik glip af en god oplevelse, fordi du beholdt skyklapperne på og lod dig nøje med at gnave de samme gamle ben. Indrømmet, det er en svær balance. Lige før jul krøb jeg til korset og købte en DVD afspiller. DVD'en er et dejligt medie og udvalget af titler vokser støt, men det var som ejer af en videosamling på ca. 1300 titler hårdt at skulle erkende paradigmeskiftet. I samme periode udsendte jeg første nummer af det blad du sidder med som en rendyrket hyldelse til nostalgien og den fantastiske fortælling; jeg har således givet Kejseren hvad Kejserens er, uden at have solgt ud af den personlige integritet (håber jeg). Usædvanlige film vil altid have en stor plads i mit hjerte. Jeg skal i den forbindelse rette en varm tak til de personer som hjalp med produktionen af OBSKURIØST nr.2 samt de som så venligt tog imod det færdige blad sidste gang. Det var både morsomt og lærerigt, da jeg i november hankede op i stofbæreposen og drog ud i byen for at falbyde det glade budskab som en anden missionær. Tak til Jack Jensen, Nils Markvardsen, Jesper Mørch, Peter Rattleff og Heine Sørensen for vores lange telefoniske samtaler om film og andre interessante emner, til Jack og de øvrige skribenter, Harald Gruenberger, Ayman Kole og Graham Rix for at lægge jeres engagement og talent i bladet, tak til Marvel-Morten og Søren Pedersen fra FANTASK og Jens Sirich fra TRIANGLEN ANTIKARIAT for skulderklap til projektet (og nej, her på bladet kommer vi aldrig ud af 1970'erne), til Ferran Giménez for at oversætte handlingsreferatet fra den spanske videoudgivelse af "Cesar Borgia" og sidst, men ikke mindst tak til bladets layouter Palle Brahe for endnu en gang at omsætte redaktørens dumdristige luftkasteller til solidt murstensværk.

Henrik Larsen

København

31.december 2001

P.S. Danmark oplevede et regeringsskift i november og forudsigeligt nok var det sædvanlige slæng af avisredaktører og statsautoriserede kulturpersonligheder hurtigt ude med forsikringer om hvor højt de elskede den nye kulturminister Brian Mikkelsen, men også med formaninger om at elske dem igen... or else! OBSKURIØST står uden for dét ræs, så medmindre ministeren går amok og f.eks. genindfører tidligere tiders heksejagt på 'de kulørte hæfter' skal han ikke høre noget herfra. Vi tillader os dog at hæve det ene øjenbryn i mild forundring over beslutningen om at give TV2 carte blanche til reklamer rettet mod børn. Brian Mikkelsen er ikke de små børns ven... hvad fætter BR sikkert er ham dybt taknemmelig for.

P.gr.a. tekniske problemer, måtte flere artikler omplaceres i sidste øjeblik. Det betyder, at fejlagtige henvisninger kan forekomme. Redaktionen beklager.

NO HORROR FILMS, WE'RE GERMAN!

By Harald Gruenberger and Henrik Larsen
With an introduction by Henrik Larsen

The German movie industry of the 1960s has received precious little coverage in Danish movie magazines and I've been meaning to do something about that for months. To learn more details I mailed Harald Gruenberger, an Austrian now living in Germany, who's running a website dedicated to unusual movies, www.metamovie.de, asking for advice. His first reply was not too encouraging, essentially telling me that he didn't know a damn thing about the subject. However he quickly proved himself wrong! At some point I suggested to Harald we'd compile the entire conversation and edit it into an article. He readily agreed and, well, here's the result. I hope you will learn a thing or two about the Winnetou and Edgar Wallace movies from this essay. If occasionally falling slightly off the track we had a lot of fun with our late night Ping-Pong sessions, Harald and I.

Henrik Larsen: *The Winnetou/Karl May movies of the early '60s... Staggeringly naive as most are, they did pave the way for the Italian western later that decade. And some actually aren't that bad, eg "Der Schatz im Silbersee/The Treasure of Silver Lake". There is also the interesting side-story of a washed-up American actor who travelled to Germany and (for reasons unfathomable to me, since I'm not a German) became a superstar over night, looked up to as a demigod: Lex Barker!*

Harald Gruenberger: Hm... I confess that I hate those movies - my father forced me into them when I was a helpless child, and I've avoided them ever since. However, if you cannot get a real fan, there are surely lots of websites (even some books, actually) to go into details on the subject.

What I can offer are some general remarks:

Those movies have been hugely popular in Germany ever since they were released, even having been restored for DVD. Karl May himself was still popular when I was a boy. What is remarkable is the fact, that the fad didn't start earlier - after all there had been earlier Karl May movies (a 1936 version of "Durch die Wüste", a big-budget 1958 colour effort, "Die Sklavenkarawane" etc.), yet it wasn't before Harald Reinl sprang into action in 1962 that

the madness began.

The earlier Karl May movies had been desert-set and thus just couldn't compete with Westerns. After WWII, everything American was perceived as being inherently superior to home-made products. It would have seemed quite absurd to attempt to do a "Western" in Germany, even though even the cheapest US B-Westerns were hugely popular at the time... if not for Karl May: "we're not aping Hollywood, we're filming the works of a German writer"! Hurrah!

The first movie in the 'series', "Der Schatz im Silbersee", cost 3,5 Mio DM (quite a sum: the early Edgar Wallace movies cost ca. 600.000 DM), some risk, as producer Horst Wendlandt admitted. But no less than 6 Mio tickets were sold - which means that, statistically, every 10th German went to see the movie.

Rialto-Film (as well as CCC) followed the AIP mode: a movie is successful? Okay, here comes another one! Thus, the '60s are flooded with Karl May movies, Edgar Wallace movies, Dr. Mabuse movies, Jerry Cotton movies... and their offspring. (As early as 1965, the hugely popular Austrian singer and comedian Peter Alexander starred in "Graf Bobby, der Schrecken des Wilden Westens", an unassuming comedy which included all the familiar Yugoslavian settings and even Vladimir Medar as the head villain.)

Today's critics often note the charming naïveté of those movies - a fairy tale world, as opposed to, say, the bizzarities of Edgar Wallace movies. It's no wonder Alfred Vohrer, in my opinion the best director of the bunch, didn't do any remarkable Karl May. For some reasons he had apparently more sophistication than, say, Harald Reinl. (When Reinl filmed the Nibelungen, it STILL looked like Karl May, after some heavy blows on the head.) But the fact remains that the films were well made - what they lacked in charming Italian-style shoddiness, they made up with craft. You won't expect intellectual or esthetical highlights from a Karl May movie, but you can be quite sure that you'll get clean, competent craftsmanship. As for the American actors --- the explanation is simple. Our two main witnesses are Lex

Barker and George Nader (who starred in some cheap, but popular "Jerry Cotton" movies later in the '60s, Cotton being the hero of a long-running series of pulp novels, not a James Bond, but a trustworthy FPI inspector). It seems fairly well established that Nader was forced to move out of Hollywood because he didn't keep his homosexuality in the closet; apparently, Barker was a bit ambiguous as well - homosexuality is mentioned, as well as a rumour of him abusing his little stepdaughter. (In my opinion, 50 % of Barkers "acting" was actually the talent of his dubbing voice, Gert Günter Hoffmann, anyway.)

Yes, I read about Lex Barker raping Cheryl Crane, his stepdaughter with Lana Turner... As to his success, well, he WAS bland, but he was also tall and blond, so it wasn't really a bigger mystery than the stardom of, say, John Agar. Lex Barker is tolerable enough as 'Old Shatterhand'. Unlike Steward Granger whom I find positively annoying with his constant joviality. At least Barker, whatever his sexual orientation, plays it straight. Oh and there's a funny thing about the guy: His ever-perfect hairstyle. No doubt thanks to pounds of brilliantine every single hair is seemingly GLUED to his skull. However rough he's treated in his movies, beaten up, thrown into dungeons etc, Lex Barker comes through with a perfect hairstyle.

I haven't seen his Tarzan movies (if I have, it must have been as a child), but I would guess this is the German influence. Women's coiffures of the '60s were particularly referred to as "helmets". And talking about helmets - have you ever seen the Reinl "Nibelungen"?

Have I missed anything? Definitely! If you enjoyed Reinl's efforts at horror in "Schlangengrube und das Pendel", you should be pleased to see him trying to create respectable mythology. (Originally, it was shot in two parts; later it was cut down to one.) Many reviewers were reminded of his Karl May movies, and the truth is that even though the memories are indeed bound to show up, it isn't Reinl's fault - after all, the Nibelungen were basically lots of action and melodrama in ancient language. No problem

with that. If they hadn't treated it as a Bible story, with picturesque locations (Iceland, if I remember correctly), sweeping camerawork etc. But amidst this Cecil B. deMille/Fritz Lang stuff, there is Western-style horse riding, an evil dwarf, dialogue exchanges to bang your head on the wall, as well as the general feeling that Vladimir Medar would show up the next minute.

Sounds interesting, I must admit. Vladimir Medar by the way is my favourite supporting actor in these movies. Almost nothing is written about him, which I find very sad. Apart from his finest hour which will always be Father Fabian in "Schlangengrube" he was prominently cast in the early Sergio Corbucci western "Massacre at Grand Canyon", had good supporting parts in the Ferdinando Baldi pepla "Massacre in the Black Forest" and "In the Shadow of the Eagles", pops up here and there in the Winnetou movies (mostly cameos) and even in the terrible Adrian Hoven horror movie "Im Schloss der blutigen Begierde" (you know, the one containing footage of open heart surgery!). If it turns up on TV again, remind me...

What do you think was the main reason for the German Western to hit that big, not only within Germany, but also in Europe, even America? Again, you are asking the wrong person...

I think you're doing fine so far! ...But my guess is that American westerns at the time had lost most of their originality - the small B westerns were dying out, their audience moving to TV, while the big productions ... well, again I must emphasise that I am not a Western type... but all those voluminous John Wayne/Dean Martin/whatever '60s Westerns - whatever I caught of them - struck me as being horribly overblown. Also, remember the incredible hunger of the US market. Just yesterday, I read that some late '50s Toho monster film (no Godzilla movie) was actually commissioned by US TV. I mean, if they import "Anders als du und ich/The Third Sex" from Germany, if Joseph Levine can make a smash hit out of the 1957 Hercules... well, why not? I've never as far as I recall read any of the Karl May novels, but

judging from the movie adaptations he seems like the German equivalent of Fenimore Cooper, perhaps even less subtle in style. I haven't read them for 25 years (I am 34 now), but it's definitely pulp; even Karl May himself was sort of a pulp character, posing as his fictional hero and pretending his novels to be real-life stories. There's really no reason to read him. However, to be fair - for a boy he works. He would have been pleased to see the movies, I guess.

I was rewatching

"Schlangengrube" recently and it's very entertaining, yet all too obvious a Germanic variant of "The Mask of Satan" and "Pit and the Pendulum". Some of the scenery is decidedly baroque, like Lex Barker nonchalantly stopping the Holy Father carrying a giant wooden cross, asking for direction to Castle Andemeier (sp?).

I thought it was "Andemir", sounding like nothing existent, neither German nor any other language, but somehow "medieval".

Reinl doesn't always manage to hit the right tone. In "The Mask of Satan", Barbara Steele having the iron mask RAMMED into her face was a genuinely gruesome scene; in "Schlangengrube", Christopher Lee having a much smaller and lighter mask little more than gently attached to his face fails to make any shocking impression.

Reinl was not a person of style. Watch his Edgar Wallace or Mabuse movies, and you get the feeling that once in a while the producer tipped on his shoulder and whispered "Remember, Harald - this is supposed to be a SPOOKY scene." So Reinl grudgingly orders the cameraman to light the actors from below. And that's about it - one doesn't feel that he has FUN. Most of his movie's stylistic traits are probably due to set designers and directors of photography - as opposed to, say, Alfred Vohrer.

There's a funny mistranslation or 'improving' of the dialogue in the US video print. In the opening sequence, standing with the judge, awaiting the execution of Christopher Lee, Karin Dor says: "I'm afraid this is only the beginning." Well, the original, German line goes: "Ich bin froh, dass alles vorbei ist!"

HA!

Trying to elaborate on the most popular German serials... The Karl May movies were "respectable" family fare, which became increasingly rare in the '60s, as opposed to the Wallace movies which were considered

lewd and tasteless (on German TV, they are still shown with cuts). They soon became notorious for not giving a shit about their alleged sources, like logic, human behaviour and about anything else; they were lewd, gleefully silly and did everything to surprise the audience. Several B/W Wallace movies had colour main titles, several irritated Wallace fans by presenting a completely different villain than Wallace had originally written, Alfred Vohrer placed the camera everywhere, frequent composer Peter Thomas was told "Do whatever you like, as long as you stay under budget." Sounds like my kind of movies. I wonder if they inspired the wonderful Italian '70s police/crime movies.

Hmmm... the latter seemed always dull to me in comparison.

The police movies of, say, Umberto Lenzi - dull?

I confess never having seen anything of Lenzi but two cannibal movies. Which were...dull. But surely you have seen some of the German Wallace stuff? I think so... I used to be very fond of the German crime TV-series, but it's many years since I've watched any.

My God! Get some! I wish I had them on tape, I'd send you some. "Die toten Augen von London" and "Der Hexer" should be the best. Both are available on German tape for DM 19 each at amazon.de, "Der Hexer" is also out on DVD (which still misses some footage but does restore the original colour main titles). "Die toten Augen von London" (based on the same story that was used for a 1939 Bela Lugosi flick, and better than that version) comes closest to being a classic, full of expressionistic lighting, weird camera angles and suspense. It even includes Vienna's very own Tor Johnson, the catcher Adi Berber. "The Hexer" is less horrific, but still very well made, and it features the weirdest camera angle ever: a complicated (and breathtakingly pointless) shot of an inspector gnawing on a carrot - seen from the point of the inspector's tongue, using huge fake dentures and a very big carrot.

This situation of Karl May and Edgar Wallace movies representing opposed approaches on filmmaking came to a point when old Robert Siodmak didn't shoot a film noir Wallace but a Karl May adventure, "Die Pyramide des Sonnengottes". It was done well enough and certainly more atmospheric than the Reinl oeuvre, but Siodmak was still felt to be slumming. There has always been a feeling of "We can't do this" in

Germany. We can't do Westerns, only Karl May. No horror movies, just Edgar Wallace. This self-diminishing way of thinking continues to this day - '50s and '60s musicals with some lovely choreography and an almost touching refusal to keep in touch with "what one should do" were commercially successful - of course, else they wouldn't have been shot en masse - but to this day, few critics admit to actually liking them.

Danish movie industry has suffered from the same tendency to rely on folksy comedies, sex comedies (I wonder to what degree the Danish and German sex comedies influenced each other).

Well, the Danish had a good reputation in Germany, probably stemming from the '60s when they were seen to be more "liberated" ... don't ask me... as for the Germans, the haircuts alone would turn me off.

Or when it gets highbrow and 'serious', we are treated to dreary 'social-realism' - in b/w, of course. It took Lars von Trier (whatever we might think of the man) and to a lesser degree Lars Børnedal (Bille August is vastly overrated) to change that.

I confess that I never even heard of the latter two - but should you be tempted to tell me about them, be informed that I just got my uncut DVD of "Beyond the Door III/Amok Train"... just for contrast! The most amazing critical ignorance is displayed when it comes to the physical aspects of production - as opposed to, say, Italian movies of the time, corner cutting is rarely on display. This gives an almost glossy feeling to the most trivial plots, and it doesn't force directors to display the nonchalant genius of a Bava or Freda. "Planet of the Vampires" would have been impossible in Germany, even though it was co-financed by a German company.

Interesting point. A German director would find it a betrayal of his craftsmanship to rely on 'cheap tricks'.

I wouldn't exactly term it "betrayal", though. One thing is the simple pride of being able to do things "straight", meaning that the image is in focus and the backgrounds aren't painted: "es ist nicht so wie bei armen Leuten", as the phrase goes.

Another thing is the screwed thing Germans have with "art". Premise 1: exploitation is bad. Premise 2: if you spend money on it, it isn't exploitation. And yes, this is NOT very logical, but that's the way it was and is. How many German horror

movies have there been produced since the '50s? There are oddities like "Ein Toter hing im Netz/Horror of Spider Island" (more sexploitation than horror), the Wallace hybrids and occasional outcast flicks like "Schlangengrube und das Pendel" (yes, it IS a cute movie, but horrific?) or "The Head". Amongst the fans, the most popular German horror movies of today ("Anatomie" notwithstanding) are the amateur works of Buttgerit & Co. (The best German horror of the last years is the no-budget political satire/idiocy "Das deutsche Ketten sägenmassaker" which, despite its childish efforts to shock the bourgeoisie, manages to be funny and even nightmarish at times.)

Yet another reason for the series' respective success: familiar faces kept showing up from film to film - only while the Wallace movies basically created their comic relief themselves, the May movies could take dialogue passages and characters directly from their sources. They weren't character-driven (of course, the Wallace movies weren't, either), but mechanically plot-driven.

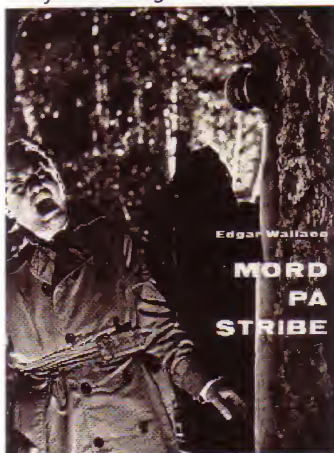
This is not a complaint: you need good, solid stereotypes to make this kind of film working. In essence, it means that you have to make the audience feel safe: the bad will be punished, the good will be victorious in a convincing way - the heroes of Karl May were heart-felt clichés, with just the kind of wishful thinking to touch juvenile readers (and viewers). When Winnetou died, a public outcry forced the producers to bring him back. If Joachim Fuchsbergers perennial Edgar Wallace sleuth had fallen victim to a colourful murder weapon just before the finale, by 1964 nobody would have been much surprised.

"Winnetou III" - I have a Danish video release of that movie; it contains a tear-jerking farewell scene of the dying Winnetou recalling his past adventures with Old Shatterhand. The 1968 movie "Winnetou und Shatterhand im Tal der Toten" (revamping the plot of "Der Schatz im Silbersee") wisely ended the series on an optimistic note, leaving room for a possible sequel: Having killed all the bad guys and married Karin Dor off to some handsome looking soldier our friends ride into the sunset. But this time it really was the end.

Actually, in the late 1990s, an aged Pierre Brice appeared in a made-for-TV Karl May movie. People were pleased and greeted the news as they would greet an old friend - until it turned out that Brice insisted to

keep his own voice (and, thus, his French accent): this was like a betrayal. The movie did not start a new vogue.

They never forgave him?



I guess he resigned. Some TV station dug out a horrible French '70s sci-fi series he starred in... I forgot the title and, mercifully, most of the series, which I had seen as a child, but Pierre and some other guy were on a planet ruled by women (with telepathic abilities or something like it). The show's

level could probably be read from the fact that planet was called "Medusa". But wait, that's not all! I forgot to mention the 2001 (!) comedy "Der Schuh des Manitu" - a Winnetou spoof by Michael Herbig ("Bully"), a TV comedian. He got 9 million people into the cinemas, being one of the most popular German movies ever. (I haven't seen it myself.) The fad lives on... And as you told me earlier, the original Winnetou movies remain popular as well, with recent deluxe DVD releases etc. Do people sincerely regard them as bona fide classics? Short answer: no. Though it's getting weaker, the inferiority complex is still prevalent. The biggest praise you're going to get is in phrases like "good old-fashioned fun" or, perhaps, "well-made" and "bringing back childhood memories". These are not really movies - they form a phenomenon. I see. Well, thanks for enlightening us on this fascinating subject, Harald. It seems the Danish and German movie consumers

have something in common when it comes to broad entertainment: a stubborn yearning for "the good old days". Or put more bluntly: a poor taste! Being a nostalgia freak myself, I would argue about "poor taste". Taking '50s sci-fi movies... people may be yearning for the Jack Arnold or George Pal films - but few people really lament the fact that Ed Wood isn't shooting movies today. In W.K. Eversons "More Classics of the Horror Films", he comments on '40s schlock horror (PRC, Monogram...): "They were poor relations then, now they are old friends." This nostalgia may not have to do much with "art", but it's human....

"Poor taste" admittedly is a bit harsh; after all I'm a nostalgia freak too. Oh well, we can blame those old comedies and picturesque adventures for being predictable, naive, moralising et cetera...

So are most movies of today, in case you forgot...

And yet, and this is where most movies of today fail, they're products of solid workmanship.

The colourful sets have a fairytale quality, the music is vulgar, but tastefully so, the women are always beautiful... and we know however bad things may turn Lex Barker will be around to save the day. Including his hairstyle!



FRI OS FRA DE VILDE NORMANNER

Af Henrik Larsen

Den italienske vikingefilm er en udløber af fænomenet peplum: kulørte sværd & sandal-eventyr, hvis storhedstid lå fra slutningen af 1950'erne til midten af 60'erne. Peplum fokuserede i starten mest på Herkules og andre halvguders bedrifter i et mytologisk oldtidsunivers, men efterhånden som dette tema mistede nyhedens interesse hos biografgængerne skete der udspaltninger, bl.a. med sørøverfilm a la Errol Flynn, 1001 nats eventyrfilm og altså film hvis handling udspillede sig i nordisk vikingetid. Som Graham Rix bemærker i sin foregående artikel er THE VIKINGS fra 1958 (instrueret af Richard Fleischer, med Kirk Douglas i hovedrollen) stamfader til genren. Indtil det næsten totale kollaps som ramte landets filmscene i 90'erne var italienske instruktører berømte (eller berygtede) for at være kvikke til at springe med på en bølge. Næppe havde en Hollywood produktion med store navne gået sin sejrsgang verden over, før driftige italienere stod parat med deres egne 'fattigmands' versioner. Hver gang blev citronen presset til sidste blodsdråbe; man fik ikke tilbuddet en film, næh, man fik en hel serie af film som gerne både refererede tilbage til originalen og de andre kopier. Eftertiden husker kun undta-

gelsesvis disse kopiprodukter og det gør dem selvfølgelig til kræfsamlere af det obskure, især fordi man ofte finder aldeles fortræffelige film imellem. De mindre vellykkede har om ikke andet høj underholdningsværdi (blandt kendere: trash faktor). Vikingefilmene hører heldigvis til i den bedre ende, bl.a. fordi Mario Bava var involveret i fire ud af seks titler. (Hvis du ikke ved, hvem Mario Bava er, så er det på høje tid - og svaret finder du altså ikke i Rikke Schubarts "Verdens 25 bedste gyserfilm"!) LAST OF THE VIKINGS (1961), den første i rækken, instrueret af Giamomo Gentilomo, havde således enkelte scener uofficielt instrueret af Bava. Det var i denne film, at Cameron Mitchell trådte i karakter som den ultimative norrøne helt. ERIK THE CONQUEROR fulgte samme år, instrueret af Bava på egen hånd og igen med Cameron Mitchell i hovedrollen. Året efter indspillede Giuseppe Vari, med lidt diskret hjælp fra Bava, dramaet ATTACK OF THE NORMANS. Denne gang var Mitchell dog skurk (overfor Ettore Manni). ERIK THE VIKING fra 1965, instrueret af Mario Caiano, havde Giuliano Gemma i hovedrollen som den tapre vikingehelt Erik, men det var Gordon Mitchells sadistiske skurk Eyolf som stjal billedet. Lige fra første

scene, hvor man ser ham bredt grinende brække halsen på sit offer er han totalt ond. Filmen fortæller - på yderst naiv vis - om en lille gruppe vikinger som opdager Vinland (Amerika) og deres relationer til de indfødte. TREASURE OF THE PETRIFIED FOREST fra samme år, instrueret af Emimmo Salvi med Ivo Payer som helten, havde også Gordon Mitchell i en solid skurkerolle. Handlingen er en bizar variation over Wagners "Valkyrien". Endelig vendte stjerneholdet Mario Bava/Cameron Mitchell i 1966 tilbage med genrens sidste bidrag, KNIVES OF THE AVENGER. Kostumefilm var da for længst passé og slutbilledet af Mitchell som red bort i solnedgangen markerede afslutningen på en hel æra.

Filmene har lige siden været svært tilgængelige, kun sporadisk udsendt på lejvideo i de tidlige firser. LAST OF THE VIKING og TREASURE OF THE PETRIFIED FOREST foreligger begge på dansk video (som hhv. VIKINGERNE ANGRIBER, Kino/Næstved Video og VIKINGESKATTENS FORBANDELSE, Breien), ATTACK OF THE NORMANS på engelsk (Inter-Ocean) og tysk video (DIE NORMANNEN, Starlight Video), mens ERIK THE CONQUEROR og KNIVES OF THE AVENGER er udsendt på græsk (hhv. All World Video Production og Video Alsen). Prisen for den

mest obskure titel går til ERIK THE VIKING, hvis eneste udgivelsesland synes at have været Tyskland (som DIE GRÖSSTEN ABENTEUER DER WIKINGER, Eurovideo). Jeg brugte årevis på at finde alle seks film på original video; almindelige dødelige havde nok givet op længe før. Men nu er der godt nyt. Sommeren 2001 udsendte selskabet Image som ejer rettighederne til de fleste film af Mario Bava KNIVES OF THE AVENGER på DVD, i bredformatet 2.35:1 og med diverse ekstra ting. En kærkommen udgivelse, hvis eneste minus er ujævn engelsk synkronisering og mangel på undertekster, hvilket dog langt opvejes af den lækre billedkvalitet. Snart følger ERIK THE CONQUEROR. Jo, der går atter gny af de gamle vikinger...

Relaterede artikler:
"De sidste vikinger" af Henrik Larsen, ABSURD #4
"Peplum - en introduktion" af Henrik Larsen, ULTIMO MONDO FRANKO
"Gordon Mitchell: The Peplum Years" af Henrik Larsen, STAY SICK #3

3 DEV ADAM (THREE MIGHTY MEN)

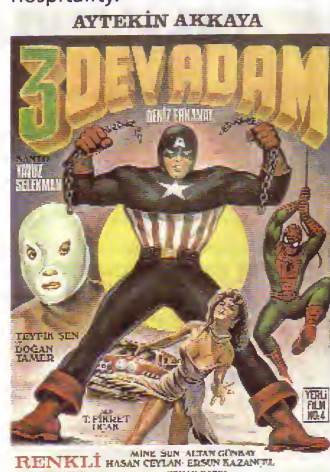
By Ayman Kole

Do you know what deli means in Turkish? It means crazy and that's exactly what this film is. Crazy yes, but in a fun and entertaining manner. 3 DEV ADAM is one of the most odd and sought after treats the vast world of cult movies has to offer. This little low-budget Turkish actioner, made in 1973, puts together one of the most impressive character casts a good movie collector can almost die for. Here we have Captain America, the Mexican wrestling superhero Santo and the famous web-slinger Spiderman all in one inventive brushstroke. But beware, Spidey isn't up to his usual heroic deeds, in fact Spiderman is the bad guy. No webs for him, although budget restriction could be playing a role here, but instead he's got a fatal pocket-knife and is more than ready to punish his enemies, employing sadistic methods enough to make De Sade proud.

Captain America, played by Turkish B-movie actor Aytekin Akkaya (ARK OF THE SUN GOD), is summoned to Istanbul to combat Spiderman and his villainous gang. He arrives with his two partners: Santo (Yavuz Selekman) and the delicious Julia (Deniz Erkanat). Istanbul police remain clueless at the goings-on and have asked for assistance from Spiderman's sworn enemy, Captain America. Apparently, Spiderman's racket is involved in historical statuettes and fake money. Spidey organizes the sales of these priceless artifacts, and then, after the purchase, offers a higher price to the buyer and grabs them back. Of course, by paying with fake bills. This way, good old Spidey gets richer and goes on 'selling' these antiques to other millionaire customers whilst counterfeit money gets circulated worldwide. And, if he isn't busy selling them, what the hell, he's out there stealing them. Have no doubt about it - Spidey's turned corrupt businessman. Who knows why? Not even the Director and scriptwriter is my guess, but I bet all those years saving innocent people has surely gone to his head.

This wacky fast paced adventure opens with Spiderman executing a young woman. She falls in a pit on a beach and is killed by the propeller of a speedboat. Keep in mind friends, this is Spiderman doing this. The woman's blood sprays all over

the legs of Nadia, Spiderman's girlfriend. She seems contented, and what a way to start the movie, and now we know this is one mean Spiderman not to be messed with. Detective Dogan (Dogan Tamer) of the Turkish police picks up Captain America and his two pals, Santo and Julia, on arrival from the airport and the investigation begins. The newly formed team concludes that these happenings are the work of Spiderman. The Mafia has also been swindled, crossing them off the list of suspicions. Meanwhile, a pair of Mafia henchman is tailing the undercover Spiderman around some barren streets. All are dressed in coats, it's a bright sunny day mind you, but hey it looks good. But like I said, you wouldn't want to mess with this guy (unless you have a mask too), and so Spidey kills them with the aid of his trusty pocketknife. The web-slinger even says adios Mafia, insecticide hospitality.



Some Z-grade modeling show is also thought to be linked in with the Spiderman gang, and so Julia is sent to keep an eye there. Meanwhile, Captain America goes for a cruise around the streets with Detective Dogan. This little scene is interesting as the Turkish cop asks Captain America (who is dressed in civilian clothes) why he dons a special mask and outfit during his missions. Captain America responds by telling him Spiderman is an immature maniac, he always wears a mask. If his enemy does the same he'll combat him till death. Wow, now there's some serious psychological revelation! Julia at last blows her cover while snooping around, and is captured by Spidey's men. However, she manages to signal Captain America by using her

watch. Yep, the jolly old pensioner Q sells his gadgets to any hero, not just 007. Captain America receives the signal on his own watch and takes off for the rescue in his full superhero uniform. Julia is taken to a deserted hideout, tied to a post and hit. This evokes bad karma because Captain America breaks through a cardboard wall and hands out a bit of his American punishment. We also find out his outfit is bulletproof and that punches that never connect still send the villains flying. Well, if Bruce Lee can have his one-inch punch why the hell not? Spiderman also turns up, sees his men getting bashed by Captain America and decides to flee. Today is just not his day. Captain America chases after him and they end up in some old cemetery where they exchange a few blows. This scene is especially fun as Spidey has a quick getaway car and speeds away. Captain America, not giving up, attaches himself to the door of the moving vehicle. The pair of them continues exchanging blows to each other from inside to outside the car window. Captain America finally loses grip and Spidey escapes, leaving Cappy stranded in the middle of a dusty road looking a little bewildered.

Furthermore, Santo has temporarily infiltrated a low-key martial arts, fitness and training school. There is a good, not great, fight scene between the Mexican superhero and a group of late night martial arts students. One of the best things about these little known Turkish productions is the way the fight scenes are handled. Too many times in major Hollywood flicks we get the usual quick-snip editing and various close-ups during the fight sequences (to cover for obvious stunt doubles). I actually get quite bothered at times when this is the case: we never get to see what is going on in the choreographed moves. Let's face it, it's a fight scene so why can't I see the fighting? The Turkish filmmakers of these cheapies have no time to ponder about a certain artistic feel to the movie either, and so the camera is humbly placed where it can capture the fight scene in its fullest. Naturally, what the viewer gets is an unobstructed and amusing display of all the kicking, punching and falling. I love it.

The flick proceeds at lightning pace as Spiderman strangles a

woman in a shower, and even executes one of his men by unleashing large killer rats through a tube to eat at the mans face. I don't know if this is coincidence, but anyone who is familiar with George Orwell's legendary novel 1984 will be having a memorable chuckle. He even skewers a couple while they make love in the shower. Alfred Hitchcock turns in his grave for sure. Add a striptease to the mixing pot and the time flies faster than Superman! By the way, it seems the filmmakers forgot all about him because he's just about the only thing missing here.

The golden rule of the Director in this movie seems to be 'give them action, grab their money and run'. Endless fight scenes keep the movie under siege and I notice some of the music is - how shall I put it - borrowed from the flop Rod Taylor western THE DEADLY TRACKERS.

The music fits in quite well actually. Also, this Spiderman doesn't like dying, I mean life is beautiful and all, but as soon as he gets killed, he's back! He ain't no Terminator however, Spiderman purposefully dresses his men in his outfit and most of the film constitutes Captain America and Santo killing every single 'Spiderman' in sight until they get the real one.

Spiderman clones himself is another argument, but given the films budget, a cloning machine is totally out of the question. Finally, Captain America sends a few hundred fake Spiderman's to hell and eventually gets even with the genuine web-slinger. Hasta la vista, Spidey!

3 DEV ADAM is an enjoyable romp into a live-action cartoon or comic book. Not a kids film, although initially planned as one, director Fikret T. Ucak went overboard with this hilarious festival of the absurd. It's sadistic, preposterous and ultra-cheap, but somehow this is one film you can see again and again. Hey, with the social aid of tonic, you'll watch it even more!

CAMERON MITCHELL: THE ULTIMATE VIKING

By Graham Rix

Born in 1918 in Pennsylvania, Cameron Mitchell enjoyed a long career as an actor up until his death in 1994 of lung cancer. Mitchell first came to prominence in the late 40's by taking a variety of minor or supporting roles before becoming a popular leading man - and sometimes villain - in Hollywood in the 50's. In his later years he became most famous for his role in the western television series "The High Chaparral", and also endeared himself to trash fans with appearances in the likes of the obscure NIGHTMARE IN WAX, the sleazy TOOLBOX MURDERS and the just plain insane RAW FORCE. In 1961 - before the onset of drink and gambling problems which were to plague him until his death - Mitchell decided to avoid paying the IRS what he considered to be unnecessary fees by travelling to Europe and making a number of costume adventure films there in order to support his family. These films unfortunately seem to have become lost amidst the rash of slapdash musclemans epics being churned out in their dozens in the 60's and it's easy to forget that there were some skilled directors operating in Italy during the period. Indeed, Mitchell found himself teamed with whom many consider to be the best Italian director of all time - the one and only Mario Bava - for his first costume adventure LAST OF THE VIKINGS and two subsequent others (as well as a third, a horror outing), although Bava remains uncredited in LAST. It seems a shame because the eight films examined below feature Mitchell in his physical and acting prime, giving a generally great performance in each one to easily beat the work of Steve Reeves and Reg Park who were chosen for their physique rather than their acting abilities. Despite lacking the biceps of these genre titans, Mitchell could still swing a sword with the best of them and as an added bonus he had charisma and could act, too!

In LAST OF THE VIKINGS (Italian title L'ULTIMO DEI VIKINGHI), Mitchell stars as Harald, leader of a Viking army, who returns to his homeland after a ten-year voyage to discover that his father has been killed and his throne taken by the evil King Sveno.

Giacomo Gentilomo's film opens with the prow of a longship appearing through the sea mists while the sombre sound of a horn play (the same tune is used throughout the film, greatly adding to the atmosphere). Sure enough, the rugged, blond-haired Harald stands tall at the prow of the ship, and only seconds later he engages in the first battle of the film by taking over another ship which is carrying the Danish ambassador to his homeland of Norway. The battle, although short, is an exciting one, with shots of Mitchell swinging into action on a rope bringing to mind the work of Errol Flynn (the connection is reinforced later on in the film when Harald engages in a frenetic swordfight on a castle stairway). Here the story begins for real.

Upon arriving back on land, Harald is perplexed to find his family home in ruins and no sign of his Viking allies anywhere. A sole survivor tells him that his cousin Sveno murdered Harald's father, King Sigurd, in cold blood and has taken over the throne. Harald believes that until he can be revenged for his father's death, Sigurd's soul will not be allowed to enter Valhalla (the Norse equivalent of our Heaven), and thus swears that he will kill Sveno. What follows is an excellent sequence showing Harald's men travelling around the fjords, using their horns to call their fellow warriors to battle, which highlights some atmospheric photography of the landscape. King Sveno, in turn, is hoping to forge an alliance between Norway and Denmark and get more soldiers from the latter country to finally kill the remainder of Harald's Vikings. Harald displays his cunning by disguising himself as the Danish ambassador and entering Sveno's castle, learning his secrets in the process. Unfortunately, there's a traitor in his camp by the name of Haakon who has set his sights on leading the Vikings and therefore frees the Danish prisoner, who will return to the castle and expose Harald for who he really is. Harald flees into the dungeon, attempting to free his crucified brother, Guntar, who was earlier captured in the woods by Sveno's men. There's a suspenseful scene in which Harald painfully attempts to

extract the nails pinning Guntar's hands to the wood while soldiers break down the door into the dungeon. Eventually he gives up and just tears Guntar's hands free and the pair jump into the sea to escape at the last minute. Unfortunately, the tortured Guntar is too weak to survive and dies as a result of his wounds. Harald has his men build a siege tower and attack Sveno's castle, and due to his inside knowledge he attacks the least defended side of the building and manages to destroy all of Sveno's army and the usurper himself.

LAST OF THE VIKINGS is, quite simply, an epic in every sense of the word. The plot is complex but never confusing and the film looks as expensive as the historical dramas being made in Hollywood in the 50's, even though the budget is much lower. As well as the story detailed above, there's also a romantic subplot involving Harald's falling in love with the Princess Hilde but the film never feels cluttered - instead, the various plot elements are skilfully blended together to create a well-paced and always interesting movie. Mitchell is strong, handsome, charismatic and intelligent as the Viking leader Harald, managing to create a screen presence as strong as that of, say, Kirk Douglas (incidentally, Douglas himself paved the way for the Viking sub-genre with his 1958 movie THE VIKINGS). The scene in which he grieves over the body of Guntar is a genuinely moving one. The only minor flaw with the movie is that some of the supporting actors are quite weak. George Ardisson, who plays Guntar, Harald's brother, comes across as more of a bumbling idiot than a heroic young man and Edmund Purdom's portrayal of King Sveno seems more akin to Kenneth Williams than a genuine villain to match Mitchell's Harald! Purdom's hammy performance is unintentionally hilarious; complete with exaggerated high-pitched laughter, nervous habits and a silly gait that makes him look like a hunchback!

Despite these minor niggles, LAST OF THE VIKINGS is a highly entertaining film to watch with some great action to commend it. In particular the final attack

on the castle is well staged as Harald and his men lob huge burning tree trunks over the battlements to burn and crush Sveno's soldiers! There's plenty of hand-to-hand combat and the film is pretty violent for the period, with numerous people being hacked to death, hands lopped off, arrows sticking in people's eyes and axes going through heads. Sveno's death by axe in particular is a good one, and Purdom can't resist some exaggerated death throes as he stumbles over to sit in his throne before he dies. In all, a fun end to a great movie that quickly established itself as one of the true classics of the Italian costume adventure genre. Mitchell obviously enjoyed himself too as he stayed on in Italy, landing a role almost immediately in another similar film to the above.

Mario Bava - who had originally helped lead the way for the genre after photographing the two Steve Reeves classics HERCULES and HERCULES UNCHAINED in 1957 and 1959 respectively - had just finished making his timeless horror classic THE MASK OF SATAN (aka BLACK SUNDAY) when he worked uncredited on LAST OF THE VIKINGS as a director. He liked working in the genre enough to immediately begin work on his own Viking drama, ERIK THE CONQUEROR (Italian title GLI INVASORI), a film which he directed as well as photographed. Bava went all-out in creating an adventure full of brave heroism and derring-do, assembling two writers as well as himself to work on the story and script, bringing Cameron Mitchell and George Ardisson back from LAST OF THE VIKINGS as the two leads (and playing brothers again), collaborating with both France and West Germany in production and finally having the film mostly set in England rather than North Sea locations.

ERIK THE CONQUEROR begins with an army of Vikings arriving to make peace in England with Queen Alice, only to find themselves betrayed by the evil Baron Rutford who has them slaughtered instead - as well as the King, who disagrees with his ruthless behaviour. Only two survivors remain, a pair of infant brothers who find

themselves separated, Aaron returning to the land of the Vikings whilst his brother Erik stays in England and is adopted by the Queen. Twenty years later (yes, this film would have us believe that the forty-something Mitchell is in his mid 20's) the boys are all grown up, Erik having been made the Duke of Helfort and commander of the ocean forces. After the leader of their tribe steps down, Aaron must duel with a rival to take command of the Vikings and, after beating the man - as well as saving his life - he takes the Vikings to the sea, where he meets Erik's ship and a full-scale battle erupts as the English ship is boarded and set aflame. The English are defeated and Erik is washed up in Viking country where he is tended by the blonde-haired Priestess Rama, the twin sister of Aaron's bride Daja, before being captured and sentenced to death.

Aaron meanwhile arrives in England and easily takes over the Queen's castle with the help of the traitorous Rutford. He returns to his own country, where his marriage to Daja takes place. Erik escapes with his family back to England and gathers an army of men together, but finds that the Viking forces commanded by Aaron have already arrived at the Queen's castle and are ready to do battle. The two men fight desperately on the cliffs, before realising through mutual tattoos that they are in fact long-lost brothers and join their armies together as one. Rutford has other ideas, taking over the castle and having one of his archers fatally wound Aaron. Erik daringly scales the cliffs and castle walls as his men invade the building to seek revenge for Rutford's crimes and to free the trapped hostages.

By reading the plot synopsis above, you would imagine that Bava's movie is packed with incident and it certainly doesn't disappoint in the action stakes, with hard well-filmed battle sequences in which you can almost smell the blood and sweat, the duel between Erik and Aaron being the real highlight. The plot is slightly more complex than usual for the genre and different enough to feel fresh, and once again as with most Bava movies there's a depth of characterisation to make the viewer feel involved. Bava's stylish touches are evident in scenes such as when soldiers toss a tankard to each other - which is followed by the camera - or when Erik scales the castle wall with the aid of an "arrow ladder" which is created

by archers shooting from down below as he climbs. Then there's the expected macabre undertones, with skulls and bones adorning the Viking stronghold and a madly gothic scene at the end of the movie in which a chained girl is tormented by a tarantula held in a glass case to her face. Unusually for the genre, Mitchell shares his leading role with George Ardisson, the two actors taking up equal screen time during the film's running time. Mitchell basically plays the same type of athletic, charismatic hero as he did in *LAST OF THE VIKINGS*, with the difference being that the real hero is Ardisson and Mitchell is on the opposite side until the end of the film. In fact he has a fairly ambivalent character, but his personality comes through as strong, just and mature - in no way is this a man in his mid 20's! This is the only costume adventure film that Mitchell made in which he gets to die a heroic death, grabbing his sword and praying to Odin as blood trickles from the arrow wound in his chest, which makes for a moving scene. Ardisson seems to have progressed a great deal with his acting since *LAST OF THE VIKINGS*, making a believable hero type, and the presence of the real-life twins Ellen and Alice Kessler makes for an interesting addition to the cast. Andrea Checchi has a ball as the ruthless villain Rutford, although with so many strong characters he gets little screen time to do his bit. Veterans of this particular genre may spot bit parts from *TAUR THE MIGHTY*'s Joe Robinson as Aaron's Viking rival, and a pre-stardom Tony Kendall (hero of *BRENNUS, ENEMY OF ROME*) as one of Erik's allies in the Viking camp.

In 1962 Mitchell only made one peplum movie - Giuseppe Vari's *ATTACK OF THE NORMANS* (Italian title *I NORMANNI*). This begins looking like another re-run of *LAST OF THE VIKINGS*, complete with a shot of a longship (perhaps even the same one used in *LAST* and *ERIK*, as the budgets were that low), before the action moves to a period England. The King finds himself being attacked by a gang of bandits in the woods, who slaughter his men and kidnap him, throwing him into a dank dungeon. The Queen is distraught and even more horrified when it appears that the blame lies at the deceitful hands of the traitorous Count Oliver, a trusted friend of the Royal court who is supposedly hanged but swaps places with one of the hangmen and escapes into the Norman army situated nearby. War breaks out bet-

ween the English and the Normans, until it transpires that the villainous Count Wilfred, Duke of Saxony (a meaty role for Mitchell) is responsible for the kidnapping and setting up Oliver to take the blame. With the Queen safely returned to the Royal palace, Oliver storms her castle with the help of his Norman friends, frees the trapped King and takes on Wilfred himself.

Co-produced in West Germany and France as well as Italy, *ATTACK OF THE NORMANS* is one of Mitchell's finest-looking films, with vivid colours and well-shot scenes of action including some great swordfighting moments to equal those in *THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD*. The finale, in which Ettore Manni and Cameron Mitchell battle it out in the royal halls, leaping on to tables and attacking each other with various ornaments and objects which come to hand, is thrilling stuff and some of the finest action that Mitchell ever did. Don't expect any incredible athletics, but the sight of two regular guys like Manni and Mitchell whacking huge swords together has a hard edge of realism found lacking in some of the over-elaborate fight scenes that Errol Flynn filmed, or indeed in the martial arts action that permeated 70's cinema - this is true, and believable stuff. The various battle sequences are also well handled and a delight to watch, while the plot has enough twists and turns to keep the film interesting throughout. A bearded Mitchell (a rule soon emerges - a clean-shaven Mitchell is always the hero, but when he's bearded you know he's going to turn out to be the villain instead) steals the show as the villainous Wilfred, creating a powerful and imposing screen character and only occasionally lapsing into moments of ham (such as the moment in which he murders one of his men, giving him "his payment" and laughing maniacally). It's an amazing turnaround from the inherently good characters he played in *LAST OF THE VIKINGS* and *ERIK THE CONQUEROR*, and Mitchell's range would further be explored with his portrayal of two antiheroes in *THE BLACK DUKE* and *KNIVES OF THE AVENGER*. Mitchell is well-supported by a good Italian cast this time around, especially Ettore Manni who makes a thoroughly convincing wronged-man hero. There's also a nice little evil turn from Paul Müller, who would later go on to do more wickedry in the likes of *LADY FRANKENSTEIN*, and strong turns from the supporting cast - the Queen, the King

and the love interest are all pretty good in their various performances. *ATTACK OF THE NORMANS* is a colourful and lively romp, not the best but up there at the good end of the movie spectrum.

The year 1963 saw Mitchell making two period adventure romps. The first was the Italian funded, Spanish-shot swash-buckler *THE BLACK DUKE* (Spanish title *EL DUQUE NEGRO*, aka *CÉSAR BORGIA*) in which Mitchell - by now an established genre mainstay - takes the title role of César Borgia, an Italian military leader who controls Rome in 1500. He plans to overthrow the castle of Catalina Sforza, a protégé of the King of France, and so lays siege to it. Catalina in turn plans to murder Borgia (by poisoning), but an assassin she sends for the job finds herself falling in love with him. Perhaps surprisingly, the movie is grounded in fact, as there really was a duke named César Borgia, an Italian military leader in the sixteenth century who was the victim of a number of assassination attempts by poisoning. What strikes me most about *THE BLACK DUKE* is just how old-fashioned it feels. This film is just like something you would expect to come out of the 30's or 40's, which is not necessarily a bad thing as it gives an air of nostalgia. Technically, the film is colourful, vivid, the costumes and sets authentic as well as being visually pleasing. The occasional action sequences are well-staged and exciting, with plenty of well-choreographed swordfights to enjoy, with the exception of a lengthy and laborious cliff-climbing segment in which the good guys scale the enemy's castle, which seems to have served as inspiration for a similar moment in *FOR YOUR EYES ONLY*! The main problem is that the lengthy scenes of dialogue far outweigh any action the film has, I can only think of two or three battle sequences over the entire course of the film and most are short-lived. Sure, it's still pacy and watchable but a little more excitement certainly wouldn't have gone amiss. The surprising thing about Cameron Mitchell in this film is that he's almost unrecognisable with his black hair and neatly shaved beard. In fact I had to check twice to make sure the person I was looking at really was Mitchell, but yes, it's him. The fact that Mitchell can convincingly play a man ten years younger than himself is testament to the actor's chameleon-like ability to change his very nature depending on the role, and the character of Borgia is in direct contrast to his quieter,

more settled role of Caesar later in the same year. Mitchell is positively dynamic in the action stakes, his athleticism leaping off the screen, and he also convinces in the strongest romantic role of the films he made in Europe. However, **THE BLACK DUKE** is distinctly ambivalent towards Mitchell's character throughout, noticeably in a surprising sequence in which he beats a chained prisoner in his dungeon until blood pours from the man's mouth - perhaps he's not just a loveable character after all. Mitchell's next film role saw him donning the grey curly wig (not to mention a fashionable scar) for the title role in 1963's historical epic **CAESAR THE CONQUEROR** (Italian title **GIULIO CESARE, IL CONQUISTATORE DELLE GALLIE**). This is an ambitious and powerful war drama, a political film with a surprising anti-war message hidden beneath the on-screen action and warfare. The film sees Caesar entering France to fight a campaign against the Gaul, much to the disapproval of the Senate who demand his return to Rome immediately after he in turn demands more men for his fight. The Gaul are led by the dominant Vercingetorix, a former Gallic slave given freedom by Caesar after winning a fight, who is razing villages to the ground and causing much trouble for the Roman legion. The rest of the film takes place on the battlefield, with various subplots as a pair of young lovers are captured and tortured and many minor skirmishes are fought before the final all-out battle. A more thoughtful film than usual for the genre, it ends with a final short soliloquy from Caesar that goes back to the images at the beginning of the movie - "I've fought and won, but I haven't conquered over man's spirit, which is invulnerable like those clouds." Unfortunately, the film is let down by a serious lack of budget, which keeps all of the major battle scenes for the underwhelming finale. The battles aren't particularly filmed well either, being somewhat choppy and lacking in talent on the part of both the cast and crew members despite some liberal inserts of blood and gore. There's also a lack of pacing in the second half of the movie (after a pretty good first half) which makes it hard to sit through at times. Ironically, although it's one of his most average costume adventure yarns in terms of action, content and plot, **CAESAR THE CONQUEROR** contains what I consider to be one of Mitchell's definitive performances. The role of Caesar

would be a godsend to any actor but there are only a few I can think of who can sufficiently pull off the screen presence to convince in such a role, and thankfully Mitchell is one of those performers. You know you're in for a good performance when the film opens with Mitchell standing in an iconic pose, on a clifftop with his red cape billowing in the breeze behind him. The film's characterisation of its title character is what makes it most interesting. Although he's undoubtedly flawed (much to the chagrin of the Senate), the movie concentrates on Caesar's strong side - being an Italian movie this is unsurprising - focusing on his generosity towards his soldiers (those who display honour on the battlefield are often rewarded), and contrasting his strong leadership skills both on and off the battlefield with his more gentle human side, as he sits stroking a lamb and philosophising on man's search for peace with a mountain-dwelling hermit. Mitchell is spot on with Caesar's mannerisms and way of speaking, delivering his almost regal lines - in which he often refers to himself in the third person - with impact and importance. This is a genuinely good portrayal of a famous historical figure, and Mitchell is matched only in the cast by Rik Battaglia as Vercingetorix, a just and honourable bad guy who's not just a caricature, as many baddies in peplum movies seem to be. A year after he had contributed to Bava's trend-setting giallo **BLOOD AND BLACK LACE**, Mitchell turned up in what was to be his last film for Bava, **KNIVES OF THE AVENGER** (Italian title **I COLTELLI DEL VENDICATORE**). This 1966 offering sees Bava in familiar dark and brooding territory with this almost gothic tale of murder and revenge once again set in Norway. Opening with an old woman prophesising the arrival of a stranger as the sea stretches out behind her and finishing with Mitchell riding off into the dusk on his horse, this is a very visual movie which makes repeated use of tracking shots of the countryside and shots of Mitchell riding his horse through the land (and, in one instance, through a river, nearly drowning the horse!). In some ways it feels like a spaghetti western, with Mitchell's introspective character haunted by his past in much the same way that Eastwood's Man with No Name or Nero's Django would be later on in the decade. There's even a showdown between two rivals who face each other off, except with kni-

ves this time instead of guns. With the King of Norway dead and his son missing at sea, the land is being terrorised by a gang of outcasts and cut-throats led by Aagen, a cruel and powerful leader who has no qualms about slaughtering women and children when they get in his way. Into the scene comes Mitchell as Rurik, a mysterious stranger who immediately befriends a woman called Karen and her son Moki who live alone in a hut by the sea. Karen's husband, Harald, is the one missing at sea and she prays daily for his return. Aagen meanwhile has designs on being King himself and plans to marry Karen, but Rurik kills his men when they approach with the use of knives (as the title would suggest). Time is taken out from the story to develop characters as Rurik teaches Moki to fish, shoot arrows and also... throw knives. In a flashback sequence we learn the origin of Rurik's character. Aagen, originally one of the King's men, went out and murdered Rurik's wife and son while he was at sea. The King, aghast at the needless bloodshed of the family of a man long regarded as an ally, banished Aagen and his followers. When Rurik returned he went mad with grief at the death of his beloved and child and went on a senseless rampage of murder which ended in Karen's rape (obviously, it's hypothesised that Moki may indeed be Rurik's own child). Sparing Harald's life, he too disappeared into the countryside to ponder his mistake. Aagen has since terrorised the countryside, and with Harald at sea there has been nobody to stop him so far. Back in the present, Aagen sends men out into the country to set a trap for Rurik, but he foils their plans and manages to kill them all with his knives. He tracks Aagen to a tavern where the pair engage in a fierce fight but Aagen escapes before Rurik can finish him. Aagen retaliates by kidnapping Moki, but to complicate matters Harald returns from his voyage at this point, and recognising Rurik, fights with him. Eventually the two men team up and track Aagen down to a secret grotto where he holds the child prisoner, and a well-placed knife from Rurik ends Aagen's reign of terror forever. Mitchell once again puts in a solid, complex performance for his close friend Bava (in a later interview, Mitchell confessed to shedding tears when he learnt that Bava had died) as Rurik, not exactly what you would term the "hero" of the film this time as he's also a hot-blooded

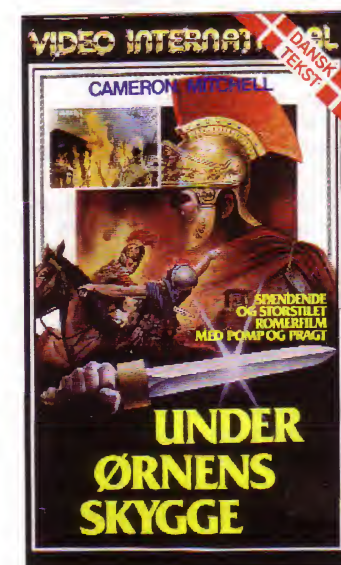
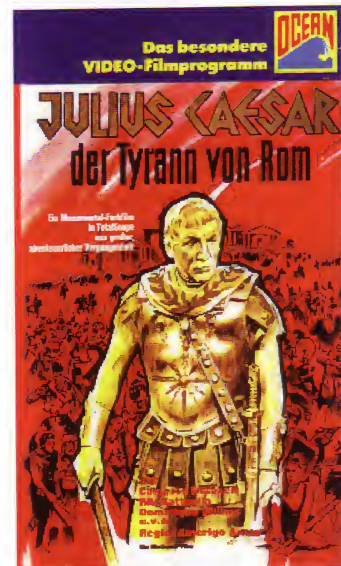
murderer. Nonetheless with Mitchell playing Rurik you can't help but sympathise with the character's plight and forgive him for his mistakes. Bava has selected a strong supporting cast for the movie, which includes David Warbeck lookalike Fausto Tozzi as the hard-headed villain Aagen, Giacomo Rossi-Stuart as the stern and good-natured Harald and Elissa Pichelli as Karen, the only woman in the cast aside from an old crone. Surprisingly, even Luciano Pollentin, as the child Moki, isn't too annoying! Despite being a small-scale drama (there is no large-scale action here, apart from a brief pillaging), **KNIVES OF THE AVENGER** is still a more than watchable film with some great action and suspense to commend it. The fights here are down-to-earth and brutally realistic, mainly consisting of two men slugging it out or Mitchell easily dispatching dozens of the enemy with his excellent knife-throwing skills. In particular a suspenseful cat-and-mouse game between two men in a dark tavern is handled very well. Bava this time keeps the explicit gore to a minimum (with the exception of a couple of severed heads) but has his fun with minor throwaway scenes; I particularly liked the moment when Aagen enters the tavern, causing a dog to whine and hide under a nearby table! Appropriate scene-setting music compliments what is a very visual film with its focus on characters and human relationships over large-scale battle scenes as in numerous other costume adventures. Mitchell's final two films for the genre are a pair of 1965 Ferdinando Baldi Roman spectacles made back to back, **MASSACRE IN THE BLACK FOREST** and the exceptionally rare **IN THE SHADOW OF THE EAGLES**. **MASACRE** (Italian title **IL MASSACRO DELLA FORESTA NERA**, and also known as **ARMINIUS THE TERRIBLE**) is an Italian-West German co-production which makes use of some great location filming in, surprise, surprise, the Black Forest. The film is set in Germany, in which a Roman renegade by the name of Arminius - repulsed by the race's snobbery and brutality, and hatred towards him due to his German blood - travels into the woods and stirs up a revolt of the Teutonic tribes against Rome. After a legion, returning home through the woods for winter, is ambushed and massacred in an area of swampland, Roman consul Aulus Cessina (played by our one and only Cameron Mitchell) is called in to

for the genre in 1966's **IN THE SHADOW OF THE EAGLES** (Italian title **ALL'OMBRA DELLE AQUILE**), in which he plays almost exactly the same role as he did in Ferdinando Baldi's previous movie, except this time he's called Marcus Fentidius. The film is one of the rarest pepla out there. This time, the forest tribes are revolting once again, particularly those in the kingdom of Pannonia. The tribe has two leaders - the blood-lusting Bertone, who wants to hack and slash his way through the whole Roman Empire, and the peace-loving Magdo, who only wants unity between the two forces. The trouble begins when Bertone and his men ambush a Roman fort, massacring all of the soldiers inside. Fentidius is assigned to kidnap all the women and children of Pannonia, which he does, and when Magdo - finally spurred into revolt by Bertone - arrives to save them, the Romans destroy all of his men and also capture him. Back at the Roman castle, Fentidius finds himself falling in love with Magdo's blonde-haired daughter, much to the jealousy of his Roman lover Julia, who frees the girl and her father from captivity. Magdo realises the error of his ways, but is killed by Bertone's men while his daughter flees back to the Romans and informs them of an ambush being planned by Bertone. Fentidius manages to draw the Pannonian army out into the battlefield where the Romans finally destroy the entire tribe. **IN THE SHADOW OF THE EAGLES** is a film similar in some ways to its predecessor and different in others; certainly, there is no overwhelming feeling of *deja vu* here, as I had feared, as things remain fresh and interesting. The plot is kept interesting through its complexity, with a romantic sub-plot (something missing in Baldi's first Mitchell film) featuring heavily and influencing the action to come. This time, the Bavarian forests are not used, and instead we get a wide range of atmospheric locations, from castles to grottoes and a local quarry used as a battleground. The action, when it comes, is pretty good with plenty of swordfighting, especially the final athletic one-on-one bout between Bertone and Fentidius complete with a stylish death for the bad guy. I tend to enjoy the different battle techniques used in each of these old-style war films, and here we get soldiers rolling bundles of burning branches down hillsides into the enemy, which is certainly something to

Mitchell) is called in to halt the uprising and gain revenge for the death of his comrades. To make matters more complicated, Cessina and Arminius were close friends in the legion together... By judging the plot you would be right in thinking that this isn't the most ambitious of Mitchell's costume adventures in terms of story - in fact it's very similar in many ways to **CAESAR THE CONQUEROR**. However, it's still a solid little movie, highlighted by fine locations which themselves are enhanced by crisp photography, and strong direction from once interesting Italian director Baldi, later reduced from this to making the likes of the deeply tacky Spanish 3D adventure **TREASURE OF THE FOUR CROWNS**. Unusually the entire cast of characters - even those in very minor roles - are fleshed out, even the women who are usually relegated to romantic roles. Once again Mitchell's presence accounts for much of the movie's authenticity, and his just and heroic leader of men, Aulas Cessina, is another triumph in the actor's career. It always surprises me that, although Mitchell appeared in a number of films in the period, which were similar in nature, each of his leading roles in these movies is always unique - and not just because he has a different hairstyle in each one! Although the film concentrates on the strategies that Cessina uses in the course of the war and we see little of his private side, Mitchell makes his character a very warm and approachable one, making you feel that if you were a legionnaire you would be glad of his presence as your leader! My favourite scene comes in the aftermath of the massacre of the title, in which Mitchell surveys the skeletal bodies of his former comrades before he himself is captured and brutally flogged in the face by the enemy. The actor's understated approach should bury any rumours that he was a ham - at least this early in his career! Blessed with some excellently-staged action sequences, including the entire finale, the setting for which is a siege with a twist which is wildly exciting, **MASSACRE IN THE BLACK FOREST** may not be original or indeed powerful enough to be a classic but it stands as a solid piece of escapism with plenty to recommend it to peplum fans, not least its air of authenticity and strong supporting turns from the likes of Vladimir Medar. Immediately once filming had concluded, Mitchell plunged on with his final role

be seen. Whilst this was unfortunately Mitchell's last appearance in a costume adventure film, sadly it doesn't contain his best performance (that would be in one of the Bava movies). He seems subdued for most of the movie, only coming to life towards the end where he gets to deliver some impressive speeches and show his human side by sparing the life of a captured prisoner. Mitchell gets to take part in two cool action sequences, the first when he is forced to run across a burning bridge to regain his freedom after being captured by Bertone and ends up with smoking feet! The second is the aforementioned swordfight at the film's finale, which is impressively done, in one long take. Aside from Mitchell, the only other actor really of note is Vladimir Medar, also returning from **MASSACRE IN THE BLACK FOREST**. Medar plays the peaceful Magdo and gets to die a heroic death, just like in the previous movie. Bertone, the film's villain, seems rather weak and unimpressive, not nearly evil enough, although Baldi deserves kudos for giving the actresses stronger characters than usual for the genre where they are actually given something to do for a change. The biggest problem I have with **IN THE SHADOW OF THE EAGLES** is that it just doesn't seem as realistic as its predecessor. Often, the low budget shows up in the sets and costumes, and also there's a sense of the cast and crew merely going through the motions instead of investing the film with their enthusiasm and energy. They even resort to padding with one of those damned dancing scenes, which are the bane of all pepla. Saying that, this is still a well-paced and entertaining film worth searching out, it's just one of Mitchell's lesser genre movies. After one more appearance in an Italian movie (the 1967 bizarre killer plant oddity **MAN-EATER OF HYDRA**), Mitchell returned to American shores and only returned over ten years later in Sergio Martino's horror yarn **ISLAND OF THE MUTATIONS**. Sadly, the eight movies outlined above were to be the last of Mitchell's great film roles. The years to follow saw his career dwindling as he accepted smaller roles in films from Mexico, Germany and Greece, or found himself trapped in Z-grade fare like **DEMON COP** or 1995's lamentable **JACK-O**. Watching these Italian movies show what a good actor Mitchell could be when he made the effort, a leading man in his prime, who for

a five year period (1961 to 1966) made the Italian costume adventure genre his own as either hero or villain. For more movie reviews by Graham, visit his great website "The Grim Reaper's Ghostly Grotto" at <http://homepages.tesco.net/~intruder/> (Ed.)



SUPERMEN, SUPERGUYS... WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

By Henrik Larsen (with a little help from Ayman Kole)

The superhero genre enjoyed huge popularity in the 60's and well into the 70's, saw a brief Indian summer with the release of *SUPERMAN THE MOVIE*, but finally fizzled out and died in the 80's. Today the films are highly sought after by collectors. The classic entries are pure pop art fantasies of suave heroes in brightly coloured spandex suits fighting international crime: Imagine James Bond merged with Batman (as played by Adam West) and you get the picture. The best were made in Italy, but France at least had the dastardly *Fantômas*, Turkey produced films starring *Kizil Maske* (a rip-off of *The Phantom*) and the cloak & dagger hero *Tarkan*, Japan endless TV-series starring cool supermen such as *Spectreman*, *Kamen Rider*, *Gekko Kamen* etc. Indeed in those days the supermen walked the earth. In Spain and India you could find local superheroes as well. England was no stranger to the phenomenon either. Admittedly there appears to have been no Danish attempts and I guess the 1962 infamy of *REPTILICUS* is to blame. Having fatally misfired that shot at the fantastic genre, the Danes decided to stick with folksy comedies and hardcore porn, for which the world is probably a better place. Last time we reviewed films as diverse as *THE FANTASTIC ARGOMAN*, *THE MARK OF ZORRO* and *DOC SAVAGE: THE MAN OF BRONZE*. In this issue you'll learn about the Japanese biker-hero *Gekko Kamen* and just how and why Captain America and Santo ended up in Istanbul battling the crime syndicate of Spiderman! But first, here's a story about mistaken identity. The 1967 film by Gianfranco Parolini, *I FANTASTICI TRE SUPERMEN* kicked off a (very) loose series of Italian films collectively known as *THREE FANTASTIC SUPERMEN*. Five or perhaps even six or seven films, each extremely hard to come by, are associated with the series, but some are in fact more or less unrelated Turkish productions. I still recall the confusion of watching *THREE SUPERGUYS IN THE SNOW*, expecting the usual adventure of bumbling superheroes. Instead I got three non-super con men trying to swindle some gangsters, all

spotting huge moustaches. Quite amusing stuff, sure, but I was baffled nonetheless. To spread some light on the mystery I mail my friend Ayman Kole in Australia, who's deep into all this stuff. "SUPERMENLER was an early 80's co production between Italy and Turkey, starring Cuneyt Arkin and Sal Borghese & Nick Jordan (from the first 3 SUPERMEN flick)," he mails back. "Apart from that, the 3 SUPERGUYS flicks like *THREE SUPERGUYS IN THE SNOW*, *THREE SUPERGUYS STRIKE AGAIN* or the follow-up with Robert Widmark *THE FLYING SUPERBOY* are 100% Turkish productions from Erler Film. Usually directed by Natuk Baytan..." So, let's get this straight: *SUPERMENLER* was a spin-off of the Italian superhero-spy films and *THAT* mutated into a series of slapstick crime-comedy films? "Well, in a way, you're right," he agrees. "The Turkish 3 SUPERGUYS flicks never featured superheroes dressed in red. However, they did feature 3 guys constantly ripping each other off for their own benefits. The actors performed athletic moves and the whole thing was

passed as an action comedy. Don't forget, the original Turkish titles for 3 SUPERGUYS STRIKE AGAIN is *UC KAGITCI-LAR*, which means *THE THREE SWINDLERS*. The Turkish title for 3 SUPERGUYS IN THE SNOW is *BABANIN EVLATLARI*, which means *SONS OF THE FATHER*. Title for *THE FLYING SUPERBOY* in Turkish is *BAS BELASI* meaning *THE HEADACHE*." I am developing a headache myself. "Now, confused?" he goes on. Yes, damn it! "Put these all together and you'll find that none of the original Turkish titles refer to 3 SUPERGUYS or 3 SUPERMEN. Perhaps, the English dubbers attached these names to them to appeal to fans of the 3 SUPERMEN series of Italy." Ok, this makes sense. The distributors always tried their best to trick the customers, re-editing and re-dubbing a bunch of unrelated films and voila, creating a hit-series. Take, for example *THE SONS OF HERCULES*. Then there's the case of the early, quite serious westerns starring Mario Girotti and Carlo Pedersoli that were altered for German TV to fit into the beloved Spencer/Hill series of action comedies.

Speaking of the Germans, some highly irregular entries made it into their long running Mabuse-series, such as *DIE LEBENDEN LEICHEN DES DR. MABUSE*, which happens to be the AIP horror film *SCREAM AND SCREAM AGAIN!* Well, who said collecting was supposed to be easy? And yet it turns out I wasn't totally off the mark after all. Says Ayman: "Your comment of these Turkish comedy-actioners mutating from the 3 SUPERMEN series is probably right! Now, Arkin's *SUPERMENLER* is not a 3 SUPERGUYS film.... it's a 3 SUPERMEN film! Yep, don't get more confused, simply Arkin made a 3 SUPERGUYS film in 1976, and then made a 3 SUPERMEN film in 1979/80 with Italy... Hope this helps, it's an equation, and I hope you were good at mathematics." Alas, I was not. I thank Ayman for the help and feebly drop into a chair. Supermen, superguys, what's the difference? Who cares anyway? Who but the readers of *OBSKURIØST*!



DET ER EN FUGL... DET ER ET FLY... NEJ, DET ER GEKKO KAMEN!!!

Af Jack Jensen

De fleste kan sikkert genkende overskriften som et citat fra Superman, men her altså i en lettere omskrevet version. I sidste nummer anmeldte Frank Brahe jo en håndfuld italienske superheltefilm (Superargo against Diabolicus, The Fantastic Argoman, The Puma Man & Three Supermen in the Jungle) og i dette nummer er det så blevet min tur til at fortsætte præsentationsrækken af superheltefilm, der ikke hører til gruppen af store, velkendte film i genren, såsom Superman, Batman og senest X-Men. Filmen, jeg har valgt, er den fantastiske, japanske The Moon Mask Rider, som helt tilbage i dansk videoguldalder udkom på videokassette fra Panorama under titlen Midnatsfantomet. Filmen starter i en bank i Tokio, hvor en gruppe personer laver et af de særeste bankrøverier i mands minde: Iført røde kapper og masker lukker de en masse fugle løs i banken samtidig med, at de sætter en båndoptager til at spille den gamle popmelodi "My Baby"!! Under flugten farer de af sted i en lastvogn, men pludselig kører en hvidklædt mand på en hvid motorcykel op bag lastbilen og mens denne stadig er i fart, springer han med motorcyklen op på lastbilens lad, snupper kassen med pengene (som tyvene af uforklarlige årsager har ladet ligge på ladet??) og springer - stadig siddende på motorcyklen - ned fra ladet igen, stadig mens lastbilen er i fart og uden at nogen opdager noget, før han er væk! Fantastisk!! Manden på motorcyklen er naturligvis superhelten The Moon Mask Rider ("Midnatsfantomet" i de danske undertekster). At han er "superhelt" er måske at strække termen lige lovlig langt, da han sådan set ikke har nogen superkræfter, men han er go' til at køre på motorcykel, han ka' springe højt og så er han iført maske og lange underhylere, ergo; han er superhelt! (man skal dog både ha' masken og de lange underhylere, ellers gælder det ikke - så Frank Brahe kan altså ikke gå for at være superhelt, når han står derhjemme i sin kones strømpebukser og forsøger at imitere sangeren fra Queen!) Politiet i Tokio er naturligvis forvirrede: Hvad er der blevet af

tyvene og hvordan skal de tilvejebringe pengene? Men så pludselig får de et telefonopkald fra The Moon Mask Rider; Han vil levere grunnerne tilbage, men forbeholder sig retten til at beholde 10%, som han så, som en anden Robin Hood, gir til de fattige. What a hero. Senere snupper han også en masse penge fra de samme tyve, som denne gang bestjæler en korrupt politiker, og gør efterfølgende det samme igen, blot sætter han nu "gebyret" op til 20%!!

Senere finder vi ud af, at de uheldige tyve er medlemmer af en Jim Jones-agtig kult, hvis leder vil skabe et "New Japanica" (hvor det gamle Japanica ligger, tjaa...). Den Jim Jones-agtige kultleder er naturligvis ret knotten over Midnatsfantomets indblanding og vil ha' ham af vejen. Politiet vil osse gerne snakke med ham og midt i det hele, så ved vi ikke engang hvem han er. You see, modsat de fleste superheltefilm/tegneserier, så kender vi ikke Midnatsfantomets hemmelige identitet. I et stykke af filmen tror vi, at vi gør, men så til slut...

Der sker en hel masse i The Moon Mask Rider, der er faktisk gang i den hele tiden og underholdningsværdien er høj. Hvis man er til mystiske mænd i lange underhylere, køretøjer der kan alt muligt, sorte ninja'er, og film generelt, der kommer ind under betegnelsen "obskuriose", så bør man helt klart se Midnatsfantomet! Det er selvfølgelig altid en smags sag, hvorvidt man ka' li' noget eller ej. Faktisk tror jeg, at jeg er mere til disse film end den herr Brahe var det i #1, fx synes jeg, at Superargo against Diabolicus er en helt fantastisk film og at Puma Man var lige lovlig fjollet. Men det siger måske mere om Frank Brahe end om filmene selv!! Faktisk kan The Moon Mask Rider godt minde lidt om en slags superhelte-spaghettwestern: Starten med helten på sin hvide ganger, den akustiske guitarmusik i atmosfæriske scener og slutningen, der ikke skal afsløres her, men som næsten gir fornemmelser af "I'm a poor lone-some cowboy..."-slutscenen i ethvert Lucky Luke-album. I øvrigt er jeg osse sikker på, at de japanske filmmagere er takskyldig til de gamle pulp-hefter med The Shadow (aka Skyggen)

fra 1930'erne; i scenen, hvor Midnatsfantomet har snuppet pengene fra bankrøverne, hører de pludselig hans mystiske stemme, der siger "Hvor ondskaben end lurer, vil månestrålen altid finde vej!" - hvilket ikke er helt ulig The Shadows: "Hvem ved hvilken ondskab der lurer i menneskers hjerter...? Skyggen ved det!" [Skyggen; Interpresse, 1980].

Den danske udgave af The Moon Mask Rider fra Panorama er i øvrigt en rigtig flot version i letterbox med engelsk dubbing og en god oversættelse. Og som en ekstra bonus får man endda filmen med den originale japanske musik og dermed også titelnummeret i begyndelsen om The Moon Mask Rider, eller som han hedder på japansk: Gekko Kamen (= "The Moonlight Mask").

The Moon Mask Rider-filmen stammer fra 1981, men historien om helten stammer tilbage fra slutningen af 50'erne, hvor den startede som tegneserie i det månedlige blad Shonen Kurabu, hvor den blev tegnet af Jiro Kuwata og forfattet af Yasunori Kawauchi. Serien løb fra maj '58 til okt. '61 og Gekko Kamen blev Japans mest berømte superhelt. I 1958 lavede filmselskabet Toei Co. hele tre filmatiseringer over serien (Man in the Moonlight Mask, Deadly Confrontation on a Remote Beach, The Claws of Satan) og i '59 blev det til tre mere (The Monster Gorilla, The Challenging Ghost, The Last Day of the Devil). Udover filmene blev det også til en tegnefilmserie, men desværre kom hverken den eller de oprindelige film på dansk video, og hvorvidt de er til at få i engelsk-undertekstede/dubbede versioner, ved jeg ikke. Der kom også en sang om helten på plade, nemlig: "Gekko Kamen wa Daredesho?" ("Hvem er The Moonlight Mask?"), og som blev et hit. Endvidere kom der allerede dengang en masse merchandise med masker, briller og hva' ved jeg. Med andre ord; Gekko Kamen blev et stort hit i Japan, ikke mindst blandt børn og dette blev faktisk også Gekko Kamens dødsstød! Ligesom der i USA engang i Supermans tidlige dage var en eller anden unge, der troede, at han kunne flyve ligesom Superman og derfor sprang ud fra en bro, så kom en masse japanske børn til skade, fordi de forsøgte at efterligne

Midnatsfantomet og efter en ihærdig indsats fra vrede forældre, så måtte Gekko Kamen sige "sayonara" og forsvandt ud i obskurditeten. Ja, dvs. lige indtil Nippon Herald Films, Inc. genoplivede ham som The Moon Mask Rider i 1981. Og sjovt nok, så hedder han faktisk også The Moon Mask Rider i den japanske version (bortset fra i intro-sangen, lyt selv efter). Der er faktisk en ret obskur scene med et band, hvor alle medlemmerne er klædt ud som The Moon Mask Rider, der spiller en sang (på japansk), hvor omkvædet (på engelsk) lyder: "mask-ed rider - mask-ed rider"!!! I det tidlige pressemateriale til filmen blev Gekko Kamen faktisk omtalt som The Moon Knight, men det gik man bort fra, før filmen fik premiere. Måske fordi der i USA var en Marvel-tegneseriehelt med samme navn (som i Danmark kørte i bladet Super-Marvel i start-80'erne) og som sjovt nok handler om en superhelt i et hvidt kostume! Man kan så spekulere i, hvem der efterabede hvem!?

Anyway, det danske bånd er svinsejældent, men hvis obskure film har din interesse, så se om ikke du ka' få fat på filmen på den ene eller anden måde. Og hvis du nu tror, at Gekko Kamen/Midnatsfantomet/The Moon Mask Rider var et enligt japansk forsøg udi superheltegenrens ædle kunst, så har du al mulig grund til at blive overrasket: Efter Gekko Kamen-filmene, og specielt fra slutningen af 60'erne og i 70'erne, vrimlede det med superhelte i Japan: Ultraman, Kamen Rider, Spectreman, Jyu Rangers og mange tons flere. De fleste nåede aldrig udenfor Japans grænser, men enkelte gjorde: Ultraman udkom på dansk video i tegnefilmsudgave, Spectreman kom der to videoudgivelser af og Jyu Rangers kørte i lang tid i sin bastardiserede amerikanske udgave under titlen Mighty Morphin Power Rangers på TV3. Se om ikke du ka' finde nogen af dem. Excitement guaranteed!!

DK-titel: Midnatsfantomet
instruktør: Yukihiro Sawada
Japan 1981
længde: 94 min.
DK-distro: Panorama
DK-video info: letterbox, engelsk
dubbed

STAR-LORD - DEN EVIGE SØGEN

Af Jack Jensen

Det hele startede i 1978 eller '79. Ja, faktisk var det begyndt allerede i '76 - ja, altså min interesse dengang for science fiction. I '76 kørte **Månebase Alpha** (aka **Space 1999**) på DRs enlige monopol-kanal. Lige fra første episode sad jeg klinet til skærmen, for når man bor i en forstad til Korsør, så er en tv-serie om rejser i det ydre rum meget velkomne. Jeg husker stadig den ene gang, hvor mine ondsksfulde forældre tvang mig med på besøg et eller andet sted hen og jeg missede den uges episode. Jeg græd! Senere engang i '77/78 kom så **Stjernekrigen** (aka **Star Wars**) til Danmark. Jeg så den på den store premiereaften i Korsør. Fantastisk! Som bekendt var der ingen, der havde video dengang, så det var ikke lige sådan til at komme til at se og gense disse fantastiske film og tv-serier, der skabte grobund for mangen en dagdrøm om rejser til andre verdener, ikke nødvendigvis i det ydre rum, men bare andre steder end lige det lokale nabolag. Så det var med stor begejstring, at jeg i '78 (eller muligvis '79) opdagede et tegneseriealbum i kiosken overfor skolen, hvor jeg gik. Ganske som i dag, var jeg ret flad dengang, så der gik lige et par uger, før jeg fik råd til det eftertragtede album, men da jeg så endelig fik det, blev forventningerne indfriet til fulde. Albummet var **Star-Lord** - nr. 1 i en ny serie med titlen **Stjerne-serien**.



Da jeg købte **Star-Lord**, havde jeg ikke noget begreb om sådan noget som, at der var forskel på de forskellige tegneres stil og at nogle forfattere var bedre end andre. Jeg erindrer ikke, hvorvidt jeg overhovedet bemærkede, at albummet var tegnet af John Byrne og skrevet af Chris Claremont, men selv om jeg

havde gjort, så var jeg ukendt med disse to herrers arbejde og virke dengang alligevel. Den slags kendskab kom først senere, da Interpresse bl.a. udsendte Claremont og Byrnes senere samarbejde i en anden Marvel-serie, nemlig **Projekt X/X-men** (trykt i bladet **Projekt X**) og **De Fantastiske Fire/Fantastic Four** (trykt i **Marvelhelten**). I disse udgivelser havde Byrne dog udviklet sin streg meget i forhold til **Star-Lord**, der mere minder om Byrnes gamle serie **Jernnæve/Iron Fist** (på dansk i **Kung-Fu Magasinet**).

Historien handler om Starlord (uden bindestreg inde i albummet), der som en anden "vand-ringsmand" i rummet ensomt flakker rundt fra sted til sted, fra verden til verden i en evig søgen på det derude. Helt ensom er han nu alligevel ikke: hans bioteknologiske rumskib er "levende" og han fører lange filosofiske samtaler med dette, eller rettere med "hende" - rumskibet er nemlig hunkøn! Men ligesom i historierne om Luke Skywalker, så er der også her problemer i rummet: Slavejægere rejser rundt og udsletter hele verdner, dræber de gamle (dvs. dem over 17 år!!) og tager de unge med sig i kæmpe containerskibe mod en ny verden, hvor der er efterspørgsel på gratis arbejdskraft. Om bord på et af disse skibe er historiens medhovedpersoner Kip og Sandy.

Starlord angriber skibet og befrier fangerne, der med hans hjælp slår sig ned på en nærliggende planet. Men Kip vil ikke være bondemand på en eller anden tilfældig planet; Han vil hævn drabene på sine forældre, og sammen med Sandy begiver de sig af sted for at bekæmpe de onde bagmænd bag slaveskibene. Det lyder som en simpel science fiction-historie, og det er det såmænd også; der er kampe mellem rumskibe, stygge rum monstre og strålepistoler galore, men samtidig med, at den simple science fiction-historie er rigtig godt fortalt, så kan **Star-Lord** også læses på et andet mere filosofisk plan. Men det kræver (som altid med de bedre tegneserier), at man gir sig tid til at læse albummet, ikke bare pløjer sig igennem siderne.

Star-Lord handler i høj grad om det almindelige menneskes søgen efter det uopnåelige, eller det, som måske rent faktisk er opnåeligt, men som vi

ikke har i vores besiddelse; *græsset er altid grønnere på den anden mands grav*. Starlord var engang Peter Quill, en almindelig ung mand, der sad fast i hverdagen, men som en dag skiftede identiteten ud med eventyreren Starlord og pakke-de sit habengut og drog af sted. Det er en søgen, som de fleste af os oplever tidligt i livet. Nogle slår sig til ro, medens andre fortsætter denne søgen mod "det derude". Historien om Starlord er historien om manden, der ikke mangler noget bestemt i tilværelsen, men søger udelukkende for at finde det, der alligevel ikke er der, det, der alligevel mangler uden at kunne sætte ord på, hvad det er. Da Starlord mod slutningen tilbydes et stabilt hjem, svarer han: "Hvad tilbyder du mig... Et imperie? En trone? Alt det har jeg ladet tilbage på Jorden! Jeg må søge... søge efter en kosmisk hellig gral... en drøm der for evigt er uopnåelig!! Eller måske... vil jeg bare se hvad der er bag den yderste stjerne!" Men samtidig med at Starlord er den, som mange misunder (ved at være en fri omstrejfer), så er fortællingen om **Star-Lord** også sørgelig: Sørgelig, fordi det er historien om en næsten ensom mand, der ikke kan finde rist eller ro, som hele tiden må bryde op og lede videre efter den forbandede gral. Næsten alene, kun ledsa-

get af et levende rumskib, der paradoksalt nok i sin kærlighed til Starlord er lige så ensomt, da det på trods af at være hunkøn aldrig kan omforme sig til en rigtig kvinde og dermed i krop elske ham. Ak! Og for at gøre det endnu værre, så husk på sidste nummer, hvor Henrik afsluttede sin artikel om tegneserien **Space Family Robinson** med at nævne, at da at serien gik ind, blev Robinson-familien hængende "derude et sted mellem stjernerne" og ligeledes gik det Starlord og hans forelskede rumskib: På trods af håbet, om en dag at komme ned på Jorden, som Tore Bahnson, den danske oversætter, giver i sin artikel sidst i albummet, så kom Starlord aldrig ned på Jorden. Ligesom rumfamilien Robinson blev han hængende derude, selv om der kom flere albums i Stjerne-serien, så var ingen af dem om Starlord. Åhh, det er så sørgeligt...

Stjerne-serien 1: STAR-LORD
60 sider, sort/hvid
Forfatter: Chris Claremont
Tegner: John Byrne
Rettegner: Terry Austin
Dansk oversættelse: Tore Bahnson
Efterord: Tore Bahnson
Originaludgivelse: Marvel Comics Group
Dansk forlag: Interpresse 1978
Albummet er svinesjældent!



RETTELSE TIL NR.1

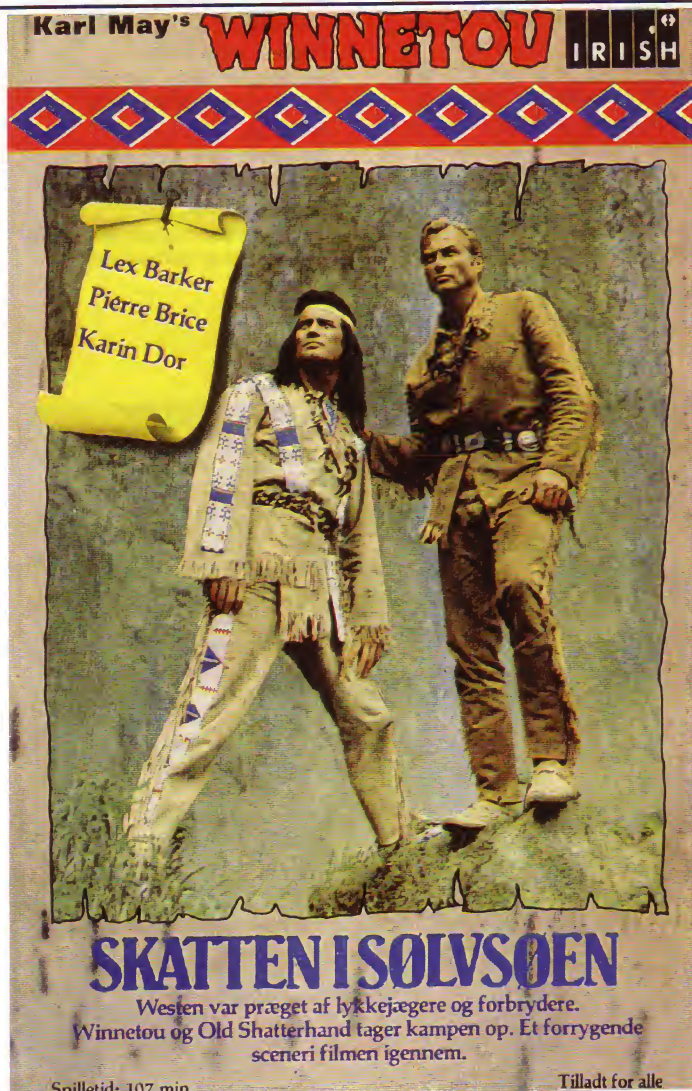
Heine Sørensen, hvis erindringer om de glade video-firsere blev bragt i sidste nummer har gjort mig opmærksom på en pudsig fejl i artiklen, side 5: "Butikken hed BOGART VIDEO.

Indehaveren Kim Bogart, Sam blev hans øgenavn..." Det er faktisk min fejllæsning af ordet "som" i manuskriptet. Ja, manuskript er måske så meget sagt, jeg modtog 41 håndskrevne læpper notatblokpapir plus diverse udklip i en kuvert; materialet vil senere blive overdraget til Dansk Folkemindesamling. (Den færdige artikel udelod af pladshensyn et par anekdoter; bl.a. om Heines jagt på et udlejningseksempplar af DAWN OF THE DEAD. I sin desperation ringede han enddog til biograf-distributøren, Obel film i Thisted, men medarbejderen som han fik fat i anede ikke et suk om filmen, til Heines grænseløse fortvivlelse.) Nå, Heine og jeg blev enige om, at sætningen jo egentlig gav meget god mening alligevel. På samme side var den oprindelige ledsagende tekst til billedet af Johan Schlüter faldet ud; den lyder:

"Indenfor et år eller to har vi rensat markedet for piratkopier".

I sin hyldelse til alle tiders tåbeligste supermænd, "Psykopater i pyjamas", foreslår Frank Brahe, at helten Superargo var tænkt som en parodi på Argoman. Faktisk forholder det sig omvendt, at Argoman parodierer Superargo - forstå det, hvem som kan.

Jeg nævnte i lederen til nr.1, at den amerikanske tegneserie "Space Family Robinson" var ret ukendt herhjemme. Fra Jack Jensen (hvis artikel du kan læse andetsteds i dette nummer) har redaktionen nu modtaget et eksemplar af "Rumfamilien Robinson" med en forklarende note om at serien blev udsendt på forlaget I.K. AIS i perioden 1967-69. Der kom 8 numre i alt, alle på 32 sider og i slh. Jeg beklager naturligvis bommerten og glæder mig samtidig over mangfoldigheden i de danske tegneserieudgivelser, især det begrænsede marked taget i betragtning.



DJÆVLE-JOHN LEVER

Af Henrik Larsen

Redaktionen har netop modtaget et eksemplar af STAY SICK#3. For udgivelsen står Jack Jensen, hvis artikler om "Midnatsfantomet" og "Starlord" du kan læse andetsteds i dette blad, ligesom du kan læse fem artikler af herværende redaktør i SS#3, bl.a. et interview med skuespilleren Gordon Mitchell. Stinkende inhabilitet på alle fronter med andre ord, hvilket dog ikke har afskrækket Jack fra at anmelde OBSKURIØST#1... og så kan jeg jo ligeså godt gengælde vennekjæresten og anmelde hans blad. *Quid Pro Quo*.

Noget jeg især værdsætter ved bladet er, at Jack virkelig tager sin redaktørtitel seriøst. Der er frugtbar dialog mellem redaktør og skribenter, der er villighed til at tage chancer og trykke artikler om usædvanlige emner. To af de artikler jeg fik optaget denne gang var oprindeligt skrevet til ABSURD som dog mente de var for underlige?! Dem om det. Stoffet i SS#3 spænder lige fra Muppet Show til Ed Geins kanibalske og nekrofile udskjelser. Vi kommer meget vidt omkring på de 80 tætskrevne sider og undervejs har Jack indsat sjove randbemærkninger om bl.a. sin blodfejde med Slagelse Bibliotek.

Højdepunkterne tæller udover Jesper Mørchs artikel om Ed Gein et portræt af tegneren Bernie Wrightson ("Swamp Thing") ved Martin Weinreich og Nils Markvardsens udsyrede fantasier om Lou Reed. "Poul Nyrup - stenbroens psykotroniske helt", en uforbeholden hyldest til 60'er-instruktøren Poul Nyrup skrevet af Jack selv, betræder hidtil udforskede stier i dansk undergrundsfilm og er afgjort bladets bedste artikel. Nyrup stod bag en serie af berygtede 'kriminal' film, mest legendarisk STENBROENS HELTE om Djævl-John og hans bande af hårde drenge. Jeg har selv set filmen på opfordring fra Jack og Heine og det var en temmelig bizar oplevelse. Den glemte b-skuespiller Erik Chris som i dag angivelig ernærer sig ved taxikørsel er totalt afstumpet og psykotisk i rollen som Djævl-John: indbrudstyv, pornograf og kvindekvæler. Hans lange, ræveagtige ansigt med det evige maniske grin glemmer man ikke så let!

Og så lige en replik: Jacks anmeldelse af OBSKURIØST#1 er yderst elskværdig (han tør vel ikke andet), på nær omtalen af Peter Rattlefs artikel om "Doc Savage". Han udtrykker skuffelse over at forfatteren ikke fortæller videre om de gamle

bøger han fandt på loftet for at se om de stadig holdt. "Well, gjorde de det så??" spørges der retorisk. Jeg ringer Peter op og konfronterer ham med kritikken. Han tøver lidt: "Jo... jeg tog een af dem og så læste jeg halvanden side og så... syntes jeg det var noget værre møg." Så meget for de barndoms-minder!

Forsiden af STAY SICK bærer sloganet "Djævl-Johns bedste psykotroniske filmblad". Det er ikke falsk beskedenhed, at jeg er enig.

STAY SICK! nr.3
Februar 2002
80 sider, slh, A5, kr.30
henvendelse: jackbib@hotmail.com



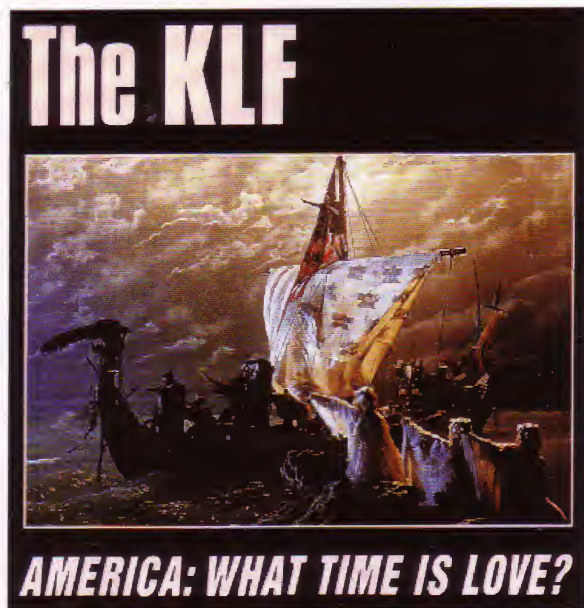
THE KLF: "America: What Time is Love?". Cd-single, 1992.

Af Henrik Larsen

Så har redaktøren igen gjort et sjovt secondhand fund, der kalder på nostalgiaen.

Ligesom FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD før dem var THE KLF ikke så meget et band som et projekt - og et fascinerende mediefænomen. THE KLF opbyggede deres egen mytologi om Mu-Mu, vistnok inspireret af lige dele gamle Hollywood eventyrfilm og teosoffernes tro på det tabte kontinent MU! Jeg kunne fortælle anekdoter om dem i spandevise, men det ville blive ren afskrift af artiklen i AMG allmusic.com som jeg vil henvise interesserede læsere til i stedet. Selv husker jeg mest THE KLF for deres vanvittige musikvideoer på MTV, især klassikeren "The Justified and The Ancient" med Tammy Wynette som gæstesanger; vistnok rockhistoriens første eksempel på crossover af techno, hardrock,

hiphop og country! "America: What Time is Love" var en anden succes-single/video: et kvænnende techno-thrashmetal nummer med indlagt episk fortællerstemme og operasang - halvfemsernes svar på MANO-WAR! Og så efter et par turbulente år i medierampelyset var det slut. THE KLF kom, så, sejrede og gik i opløsning, intet nyt dér, men gjorde modsat så mange andre popfænomener et varigt indtryk på den generation som havde oplevet dem. F.eks. lod redaktøren for et konkurrerende hjemligt filmblad sig inspirere af en KLF sang, da han skulle navngive sit forlag. *It's Grim Up North...* selv når man bor i Slagelse.





EN EL CORAZON DE LA TIERRA



Columbia Pictures

DOUG McCLURE · PETER CUSHING
CAROLINE MUNRO

(SOBRE UNA NOVELA DE EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS) technicolor

DIRECTOR
KEVIN CONNOR

Rejsen til de glemte films land
fortsætter i næste nummer af
OBSKURIØST!